REPORT OF THE HOFFMAN-BOSTON PLANNING COMMITTEE

August 22, 1963

TO: MEMBERS OF THE ARLINGTON COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

SUBJECT: PLANNING THE TERMINATION OF HOFFMAN-BOSTON HIGH SCHOOL

The assignment given to this committee is clear. This committee is expected to recommend a plan and procedures for implementation of a definite decision of the School Board: that the Hoffman-Boston Senior High School program shall be terminated and that senior high school students from Hoffman-Boston shall be reassigned to the other, larger high schools in the County. The matters remaining for decision and on which this committee is expected to advise include: timing, administrative and personnel provisions, and such instructional provisions as may be appropriate. The principal issue, overarching the others, is timing.

RELEVANT FACTS AND FINDINGS

The Basic Decision

The School Board's decision obviously reflects the social values of an enlightened community, a community which supports equal opportunity for all of its citizens. The decision also reflects the application of practical economic considerations for the years immediately ahead, in which the already inadequate Hoffman-Boston facility will become grossly overextended by 1967. The Committee's job is to relate these considerations to the facilities and needs at the other high schools and to the welfare of all students and the community as a whole.

The Senior High Program

Arlington County has made remarkable progress over the past decade in improving the adequacy of its senior high school program. This improvement has been accomplished in spite of relative overcrowding that has been almost chronic. At the present time the three larger high schools offer rich and varied programs, encompassing: (1) a full range of advanced-placement academic courses in English, foreign languages, social studies, mathematics, and science; (2) full-scale terminal programs in several major vocational fields; (3) wide-ranging selections of elective enrichment courses in English, social studies, art, and music; and (4) a selection of language programs covering four or more years each of Latin, French, Spanish, and German, as well as two years of Russian.

This advanced instructional program undoubtedly could be made even more effective if the facilities in which it is offered were less crowded, more adapted to flexible class arrangements, and more adequately equipped in such aspects as laboratories, science storerooms, and facilities for nonacademic course offerings. Even so, the educational opportunities

available at Wakefield, Washington-Lee, and Yorktown are without question much broader than Hoffman-Boston can offer.

As an example of contrast in scope and depth of course offerings the Committee noted the following: Courses regularly offered at Washington-Lee, Wakefield, and Yorktown High Schools during the six years 1956-57 through 1961-62 but not offered at all or more than once at Hoffman-Boston included:

Various advanced mathematics courses

English electives (dramatics, journalism, advanced composition) and the English-art-music seminars

Social studies electives (economics, commercial law, U.S. and world affairs, psychology)

German, Spanish, Latin and advanced level French courses

Music theory, mixed chorus, and orchestra

Third and fourth year art courses

Advanced courses in foods and homemaking

Electrical fundamentals and general metals

Distributive education and diversified occupations

A few of these courses were not started as long as six years ago, and in a very few other instances courses were skipped for one year only at one or another of the large schools, but no student attending any of the three large schools for three successive years was denied an opportunity to take these courses.

Since very few were offered even once in a six year span at Hoffman-Boston, only a tiny minority of its students had a chance to take such courses. The simple fact is that even if only 3%, say, of any student body is interested in a particular specialized or advanced course, the

class can be fairly readily offered at a large school (1500 or more) but it is forbiddingly expensive, both as to use of faculty and space, to offer it at a very small school (250).

Hoffman-Boston Senior High School, with its enrollment of only 250 students, (270 in 1964-65), cannot afford to offer much more than the basic courses in each subject area, even by combined assignments of faculty to both junior and senior high school courses. In addition, the Hoffman-Boston plant at this very moment has inadequate library, music, shop, auditorium, and gymnasium facilities for a combined junior-senior high school program. To make Hoffman-Boston an adequate senior high school obviously would require substantial expenditures. However, the building can be made adequate for the junior high program by remodeling of classrooms which become available when the senior high program is terminated.

Some stress has been laid on a low pupil-teacher ratio at Hoffman-Boston, resulting presumably in more attention to individual student problems. But too much faith probably is not justified in the traditional "advantages" of a small high school as compensation for sparsity of course offerings. The budget for the current school year actually does not provide a pupil-teacher ratio at Hoffman-Boston much different from those in other County secondary schools. Statistics also show that during the last school year average class sizes at Hoffman-Boston were similar to those in other County secondary schools.

The problem is not one of quality of faculty at Hoffman-Boston. In terms of graduate degrees, diversity of geographic and college origin, scholastic honors, and recognized professional achievement in the form of awards and fellowships, the teachers at Hoffman-Boston appear to be

an outstanding group. The Committee has examined the collective professional characteristics of this faculty and finds that they evidence a genuine asset to the Arlington School system. The utility of this faculty to Arlington County clearly should be preserved.

The decision to close Hoffman-Boston Senior High School is, therefore, very tangibly a decision to equalize facilities, course offerings, and other educational opportunities for the students of Hoffman-Boston in comparison with other students throughout the community. Nevertheless, the merits of this decision rest not only on educational grounds but also are a matter of social conscience. They are related to the best interests of Arlington and of the nation. Social stability and progress in Arlington are in large measure related to the ability of all its residents to find gainful employment in an increasingly complex economy. The nation cannot afford a failure to find and fully educate all of its talented citizens, whatever their race or economic status, or wherever they may live.

In practical terms, the cost of providing fully adequate facilities and program for Hoffman-Boston comparable to those at the larger high schools would be exorbitant, even if such an endeavor were socially justifiable. Even the maintenance of existing standards for this school would call for many needed improvements as noted and for overall expansion of physical plant after 1965, because enrollments of the combined junior-senior high school would burgeon increasingly beyond rated capacity of the building. Hoffman-Boston could not, in fact, absorb anywhere near the overcapacity that the larger schools have coped with in recent years. Hoffman-Boston is the smallest of all the secondary schools. Differences in junior and senior high school programs also would limit the school's

ability to provide for overenrollments.

Although space might be relieved, closing out part of the senior high program in one year (say, the sophomore year) and the remainder in the next year would aggravate rather than relieve the problem of flexibility and range of course offerings. The impracticality of operating too small a school in this technological age would hardly be alleviated by making it substantially smaller even for one year. Nevertheless, with reference to the situation at other schools, this possibility cannot be summarily dismissed.

Relationship to Total Senior High Plant Requirements

The relationship between closing of Hoffman-Boston and space needs in the other high schools is a central consideration. Yet it must not be exaggerated. In perspective, there is only a relatively small and transitory relationship between these two matters.

The total number of students to be absorbed by the three large high schools if all three grades at Hoffman-Boston were to be closed out at once is estimated at 270 in 1964, in a total senior high population of 6280. This represents not quite 4.3% of the total senior high enrollment. If transfer were achieved in 1965, the estimated number would be 250, something less than 4.2% of a total enrollment estimated at 6000.

If established attendance areas were to be retained, most of the transferred students would go to Wakefield. The result in that case would be more than Wakefield could cope with, and would cause undue hardships for all students assigned to Wakefield. Possible adjustments in attendance areas, however, would equalize the overloads carried by the three schools at about 16% in 1964 or 11% in 1965. By comparison, the three high schools carried an average overload in 1962-63 of about

11% and are carrying about a 14% overload in the current school year (17% at Wakefield). While any significant overload is undesirable, the situation upon termination of Hoffman-Boston Senior High School, either in 1964 or 1965, will not be significantly different from that which the three large schools have experienced and are experiencing this year.

The overloads will, in fact, be significantly less than have been experienced as recently as 1959-60 by Wakefield (29.9%) and 1958-59 by Washington-Lee (31.5%). These figures are not directly comparable, of course, for two reasons: (1) In the years past where schools experienced 30% overloads, some "off-campus" classrooms were provided temporarily. (2) Program improvements since 1959, such as language laboratories and the addition of more varied course offerings, make over-scheduling of the schools' facilities more difficult to handle without disruption.

It should be noted also that planned remodeling of basement space in Wakefield will make available four additional small classrooms by 1964, thus reducing an equalized overload to about 14% in 1964 or 9% in 1965.

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the three large high schools can absorb students from Hoffman-Boston in 1964 without creating conditions less tolerable than exist in the current school year. In 1965, the resulting conditions would be better than exist for the current year, as far as overall statistical comparisons are concerned.

This comparison does not in any way detract from the separate and distinct question as to the desirability of present pupil/space ratios.

Nor does it deal with the adequacy of present facilities in terms of flexibility or type. It can be demonstrated that changing educational programs require not only different types of accommodations but some adjustments in criteria for total space requirements. Evidence certainly shows that the high schools have absorbed their past and present overloads only by excessive use and even permanent conversion of space designed for other than classroom purposes, with the result that facilities now in use probably do not meet the standards of the Virginia State Board of Education's School Planning Manual.

These are matters beyond the direct assignment of this Committee, however. The number of students to be transferred from Hoffman-Boston is sufficient only to prolong for an additional year (if transferred in 1964) the degree of overall overcrowding experienced in the past two years. However, as noted earlier, a small reduction in overload would occur if transfer were deferred to 1965.

In the matter of timing, then, the effects of prolonging overcrowding of the high schools at present levels must be weighed against the effects of additional delay in implementing the School Board's decision of last April.

Factors to be Considered in Planning the Changeover

Timing obviously is one of the basic considerations involved in implementing the decision. Timing is related to the ability of receiving schools to absorb the transferred students without jeopardizing program effectiveness or the students' ability to adjust to the change in schools. Timing is directly related to a decision on when or how much (or whether or not) to adjust attendance areas.

Another consideration affecting the timing of the change is the

prevailing policy which allows Seniors subject to redistricting to finish in a school where they previously have attended for two years. Seniors from Hoffman-Boston would not have such an option if their school were closed at once. But if this option were retained for other students who might be subject to a move as a result of the transfer, some skewing of planned overload adjustments would result, leaving Wakefield with a slightly higher overload in the first year of the transfer. However, the planned conversion of the four small classrooms at Wakefield probably would be more than enough to compensate for the difference. Availability of this option could be expected to encourage a positive acceptance of the change by students in the three large schools.

Among the most important factors to be considered is the placement of Hoffman-Boston teaching staff members whose positions would not be needed when the senior-high school is terminated. Fortunately, the number to be absorbed would be small, and the Hoffman-Boston staff generally is made up of clearly well-qualified and experienced individuals. As soon as possible, the size of the staff reduction in Hoffman-Boston should be determined. Specific teachers involved in the reduction should be identified and the School Personnel Department alerted to plan for their absorption elsewhere in the County in the school year of the student transfer. In recent years more than 100 secondary teachers have left the County annually. The number of teachers to be transferred from Hoffman-Boston would be not more than 10-15% of this number. If the teachers involved are identified early and tentatively placed as appropriate vacancies come to light, it is reasonable to assume that they all could be placed in Arlington.

Advance orientation and guidance should be provided, also, for the

students who will be involved in the transfer. This guidance should be extensive and should begin well in advance of the transfer date. The emphasis in this counseling should be on helping the students to understand and prepare to take advantage of the courses and programs which will be available to them in the larger schools.

ALTERNATIVES

Three different timetables have been considered by the committee. Of the considerations listed above, only those considerations regarding capacity of existing facilities are materially affected by the alternatives. Sufficient time exists in any case for counseling of students and for planning to place the teachers who will be affected.

A. Termination and Transfer in September 1965

The alternative most favorable with regard to space is, of course, to wait until the fall of 1965 to implement the School Board's decision. At that time, the degree of overenrollment in the three schools, if equalized by boundary changes, would be substantially less than the schools presently are experiencing.

This would be the only advantage to such a delay, however. Psychologically it would not be good for the total community to defer action for two years when people are prepared to accept it much sooner. The most serious argument against this alternative, however, is that it delays too long the opening of greater program opportunities to the students of Hoffman-Boston.

B. Phasing Out

A possible middle course could be defined as a "partial phasing out." Under this plan, sophomores could be transferred in the fall of 1964, the 1964-65 seniors would be graduated from Hoffman-Boston, and the 1964-65 juniors would be transferred to the other schools in September 1965.

The principal advantage of this plan would be that it mitigates the problem of overenrollments for the larger schools. It also would spread over two years the period for placing Hoffman-Boston teachers

in other schools in the County.

However, this plan would require especially careful planning in order to operate a partial senior high school program for less than 200 students at Hoffman-Boston during the transitional year. It probably would require such measures as assignment of teachers from other schools to teach one or two classes daily at Hoffman-Boston. For Hoffman-Boston students who are juniors in 1964-65 it also would partly obviate the opportunity to avail themselves of expanded course offerings in the larger schools

C. Termination and Transfer in September 1964

The third alternative--making the complete change immediately in 1964 with redistricting to equalize overloads--would represent the most dynamic and forceful implementation of the School Board's decision. It would, admittedly, represent the greatest inconvenience to staff and students in the three larger schools. But if the degree of crowding can be tolerated, this alternative would more quickly achieve the social goal of equal educational opportunities for high school students in Arlington County. The major disadvantage, as already implied, is the deferral of relief from overcrowding in the three large schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All things considered, the Committee recommends that the School Board take steps immediately to implement Alternative C. We believe that this represents the best balance of forces in recognition of overall student welfare and community commitment. In addition, we recommend:

1. That advance orientation of students at Hoffman-Boston who are to be transferred be initiated at least six months before termination of their last year at Hoffman-Boston, including visits at the school to which transfer is anticipated, explanation of course and extracurricular opportunities at the new school, and planning of individual student programs.
2. That, under any alternative, senior high school boundaries be adjusted so as to equalize the overload on the three large senior high schools, taking into account the projected additional classroom space already being converted for Wakefield in 1964, and that in adjusting the boundary between Yorktown and Washington-Lee the east-west line (along North 22nd Street west of Glebe Road) be straightened.
3. That individual placements of members of the Hoffman-Boston teaching staff be made as soon as projected opportunities open up in advance of the termination of the Hoffman-Boston Senior High program, with special attention being given to: (a) the best distribution of talent throughout the school system; (b) the balance of skills and talents in any given school; and (c) the adequacy of the staff scheduled to remain

at Hoffman-Boston to carry on the Junior High School program, so long as it continues as such. Turnover in the total teaching staff in the school system is such that no forced separation of a teaching staff member from Hoffman-Boston or elsewhere should occur on any grounds except inadequate teaching performance of such a character that would normally result in separation if the Hoffman-Boston transfer were not taking place.

4. That every effort be made at the earliest possible opportunity to upgrade physical facilities in all high schools to keep pace with changing program needs, with special attention to physical education and cafeteria facilities at Washington-Lee High School and shop facilities at Wakefield High School. (This issue is related to the Committee's assignment, because undesirable conditions in these respects at these schools will be exacerbated by <u>any</u> increase in student enrollment at <u>any</u> time and, indeed, should be corrected even with present or lower enrollments.)

5. That the School Board provide funds, at the earliest possible opportunity, to improve facilities at Hoffman-Boston for an adequate Junior High program, particularly for improvement of the library, physical education, music, and industrial arts facilities at that location.

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